

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. Skelton) for bringing us together this evening. I thank him for training his insight on a situation that, as I say, this as somebody who did not vote for the resolution in the first place because of my apprehension, but I could not have foreseen it being mishandled in a way that has produced the situation we face today.

I salute the gentleman for his leadership, his voice of reason throughout my tenure in Congress during some very difficult times. Whether it is in the Balkans or it is the Middle East, he has focused our attention. He has asked the right questions, and he has done so in a way that permits people to get past some of their biases and concerns and I think really approach it in an open, honest and forthright fashion. I salute the gentleman for that. I appreciate the leadership he is providing this evening.

I listened to the gentleman's appraisal and I could not agree more, that, sadly, this administration was not prepared to win the peace, and this, as my colleague has pointed out time and again, is not the fault of our men and women in uniform, who have performed heroically. They have done the task that is assigned to them and more.

I think it is clear that what we have seen here has been a failure of the people at the top, who refused to listen to the men and women in uniform in the command structure. They have indeed, as the gentleman mentioned, been diverted from the real war in Afghanistan, something that the vast majority of people in this chamber were united behind. They understood that was the origin of the attack on the United States. That is where al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden were headquartered. That is where we needed to act. Sadly, we did not finish the job. We were diverted.

We have seen stress unprecedented on our National Guard and ready Reserve, and I appreciate the gentleman focusing on that. It is something that I encounter every week as I go home, hearing from the families, from the employers, the news accounts, the meetings we have had at home where sometimes there are people that just want to have a confidential moment.

A couple of weeks ago, I had a young man call the office. I was very tightly scheduled. He said, "I'll tell you what. I know you're going back to Washington, DC. Can I come and ride to the airport with you? I just want to tell you what's in my heart before I go back."

It was for me extraordinarily frustrating to hear this young man unburden himself. He was

back stateside because he had won a special commendation. He was back, but he wanted me to know the deep concern that the men and women he served with had about what was going on.

As the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. Skelton) said, we did it to ourselves. Three years ago, the world was united behind us. We had specific objectives. There was a sense of unity here that could have been mobilized and was not, but I think the question that the gentleman is raising for us is not just focusing on what went tragically wrong, understanding what is there, but he is focusing our attention on where we go from here, how do we do right by these young men and women in the field, how do we do right by the people in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Well, I think, first and foremost, I would like to see us do a better job at oversight, and I know the gentleman has done his best as the ranking member of the Committee on Armed Services, but there is no excuse for our not being able to do a better job of pulling this information out, sharing it with our colleagues and the American public, and holding people accountable, doing a better job of focusing on what is happening to the 5,600, what are we calling them, post-active duty people who are being brought back to service yet again. The strains that have been put on the ready Reserve, more people called up than in every previous mobilization from the Cuban missile crisis through every decade, every year right up till today, we have had this amazing stress.

What can we do? We can have an honest accounting of the costs and consequences, not the budgeting that puts it off till the future. We can chase down what happened with that prison abuse scandal and not scapegoat a few young men and women who were in a situation, candidly I think, over their heads. I would have liked to have thought that they would have known better, but by no stretch of the imagination can the evidence coming forth lead us to believe that we can resolve this by simply coming down on a half dozen, a dozen of these young men and women. It goes much further up the chain of command, all the way to the top. When we look at what orders have been issued, side-stepping the Geneva Convention, detention, it is a failure of responsibility at the top. We ought to hold them accountable.

There is also the focus on the people who are, to a greater extent than ever before in wartime in the United States, dealing with unaccountable, unelected, no-bid contracts and contractors who are doing things that should be the purview of the United States military, and had they been done, they would have been done far, far better.

We can shift much of this activity overseas to the locals, but it is insanity when we are paying \$10-, \$12,000 a month for contractors to drive a truck when we have Iraqis, for instance, unemployed, who would take that job for a couple hundred dollars a month and put that right back into their families.

Last, but by no means least, it is important that we not forget about Afghanistan, and I appreciate my colleague focusing our attention on that this evening. Here is a country from which the attack on the United States on 9/11 was launched. Here is a country that has been abused and damaged for over a quarter century. It is larger than Iraq. It is poorer than Iraq. It has a larger population than Iraq. Our friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Ryan) just pointed out how narco-terrorism is building and some of those resources are being used against us in the war on terror, and yet we are investing less than one-tenth of the amount of money in Afghanistan as we are in Iraq, and we have a much tinier military footprint, about one-ninth.

I appreciate the gentleman from Missouri's (Mr. Skelton) leadership, his attention and the calm and quiet, thoughtful way he has analyzed this issue in a way that I think ought to touch the mind and heart of every Member of this chamber. I look forward to working with him in the weeks and months ahead to try and recover our momentum, our balance, and place our priorities where they belong and do right by the American people, the Iraqis, Afghanistan, and win this struggle against terror.